

Monday storm closes roads, campgrounds in Chippewa National Forest

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CHIPPEWA NATIONAL FOREST — A 15-mile-wide and 70-mile-long section of the U.S. Highway 2 corridor was affected by Monday's storms, with blown-down trees causing the closure of roads and campgrounds around the Chippewa National Forest.

"It is a very dangerous to be in that area right now," Chippewa National Forest Supervisor Darla Lenz said. "The trees are piled, they are down (and) they are hanging. We want to close it down to make sure that it is safe for the public."

The Minnesota Department of Natural Resources said Monday's storm affected a total of 200,000 acres, with 15,000 acres sustaining moderate to severe damage.

Lenz said the most significant damage occurred around Pike Bay, Lake Winnibigoshish and Norway Beach.

Cleanup continues in the area as crews clean up roads to campgrounds and recreational homes, but Lenz said some of the cleanup and repairs will take months.

West Winnie Campground, South Pike Bay Campground and Tamarack Point are closed for the time being, as well as Norway Beach, which took a major hit.

The storm fell about 10 acres of red pine trees at the entrance to the area, said Ann Long-Voelkner, North Zone public services leader. Long-Voelkner said the downed trees were scattered in the actual camping area but there still were many down.

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Norway Beach: Forest

When the storm hit, 70 campsites were set up. Long-Voelkner said many of the campers took refuge in the bathrooms.

The four campground hosts contacted the U.S. Forest Service Monday night to say the road out of the forest needed to be unblocked, Long-Voelkner said.

"The Forest Service came in that night and cut a corridor through the trees just wide enough for a truck pulling a camper to get through," Long-Voelkner said. "Their quick response helped ensure our campers' safety."

Norway Beach Recreation Area and the U.S. Forest Service are still evaluating the damage across the forest, Long-Voelkner said.

"We're talking about the future," she said. "We're trying to figure out how to best

address all of the snapped-off trees and trees leaning on each other."

While the campground is closed indefinitely, Long-Voelkner said she hopes it will be open next summer.

"Initially I was very optimistic we'd reopen soon," Long-Voelkner said. "But the more and more I see the extent of the damage, the worse I realize it is. But nobody was hurt, and that's truly a miracle."

Lenz said much of the National Forest remains intact, and she advises people traveling to the area to be careful in the blown-down areas.

Meanwhile, Lenz said the process is to clear the fallen trees, making the camp areas safe as possible, and then the park will assess the blow down and look to auction the timber.